

WILLIAM JAMES AT THE BOUNDARIES: PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF KNOWLEDGE. By Francesca Bordogna. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 392 pp. \$39.00.

One could say many things about this book. It was the subject of the author's dissertation. She has been mulling over the topic assiduously for fifteen years. It is a masterful document of scholarship in the tradition of the sociology of scientific knowledge. There are hints of post-modernism throughout, including some unsubstantiated conjectures about James the man from that point of view. There are many little points about which one could quibble. Regardless, it has a central focus that, in my mind, is the single most important contribution to James scholarship since John McDermott and Charlene Haddock Seigfried identified radical empiricism as the core of James's metaphysics. The idea that Professor Bordogna puts forward is that the reason James does not seem to fit anywhere, yet everyone can find a place to stand under his umbrella, is that he was not just all over the place but actually took a decided stand against the categorization of knowledge systems developing at the time in the form of the specialization of thought in the West.

Science was in; philosophy, religion, and the humanities were out, relegated to the dust bin of a previous era. Sociology, psychology, and anthropology became different domains of knowledge. Psychiatry was based on medical science, while psychology, trying to pass itself off as a natural science after physics, became a social science in the pecking order of the reductionistic sciences. Philosophy survived by veering off into symbolic logic and the mathematicalization of thought, thereby subsuming itself for the next 100 years under the presuppositions of the scientific method in the form of what came to be known as analytic philosophy. Professor Bordogna tracks all these changes but at a much more detailed level, digging out the various contested points of view in the late 19th century that were resolved in the direction of the systems of knowledge we have in place today that most highly value the rational ordering of sense data alone, which have, in my opinion, become the basis for a misbegotten definition of the whole of reality. Professor Bordogna, however, can be forgiven if she did not make anything more out of this position that James took than a statement about James himself and the possibility that Jamesian ideas could have a future influence on cross-disciplinary communication and how we see the relation between knowledge and personal experience.

The implications of her work, to me, are enormous for the way in which James has been interpreted, and give new meaning to the viability of James's agenda for the future direction of both the arts and the sciences and their relations in Western thought.

For instance, there is a standing joke among James scholars that psychologists only read James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), while philosophers only read his *Will to Believe* (1897) and his *Pragmatism* (1907), while religious scholars only read *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Each discipline tries to make James over into its own kind by cherry picking, without grasping the totality of his oeuvre. At the same time, the analytic philosophers try to make James over into a meliorist, and claim that pluralism means relativism, which is a philosophy that stands nowhere as compared to the power of logic and reason. Experimental psychologists who control the definition of psychology in the academy read James's *Principles* and find not a single principle in it. Religious scholars are not always adept at separating the generic experience of spirituality within the person, James's position in *The Varieties*, from denominational definitions of religion. With regard to the narrowness of the structures of knowledge, James was clearly pointing out the limits of Western thought from where he stood. From this vantage point, however, his detractors come across looking like fish out of water.

And where was this place? Professor Bordogna does not really develop this important idea except to define James's position on the individual, compartmentalized ideas of the rationalists, standardizers, and gatekeepers who were against James's kind of thinking at the time. We don't hear much about 'to what end?' But she does give a few hints, not the least of which is Bordogna's main thesis that James was a thoroughly original and independent thinker. This confirms for me the theme of Emerson's essay, "The American Scholar," delivered in 1837. There, Emerson, later to become James's God Father, called for the development of a point of view unique to American cultural consciousness. Transcendentalism subsequently became the first uniquely American philosophy independent of European roots. There can be no doubt that James was the consummate example of Emerson's American scholar as the inheritor of the Swedenborgian and Transcendentalist's intuitive psychology of spiritual self-realization, which he translated into a psychology of individual differences, a science of consciousness, the centrality of experience, and the case for the efficacy of belief in the more scientific era in which he matured. Pragmatism in James's hands, the off-spring of New England Transcendentalism, along with its co-founder Charles S. Peirce, and its spokespersons, such as John Dewey, then

became the first uniquely American philosophy to have international consequences as it became the orienting idea of the Progressive Era in the opening decades of the 20th century. But that lineage was cut off by Two World Wars and the intervening Depression. This brought Neo-realism, behaviorism, logical positivism, and analytic philosophy to prominence, narrowing the intellectual and spiritual scope of modern American thought. Our need today, in my opinion, is to recover this uniquely American Emersonian and Jamesian legacy, with its emphasis on “open-mindedness, inclusiveness, tolerance, antidogmatism, , respect for different points of view,” and a consciousness of others’ mental states and different lifestyles, if we are to move forward and grow as a healthy nation.

From this point of view Professor Bordogna’s book, though she probably had not intended it in just this way, will likely have an influence in the field of James studies for some time to come.

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